

Amendments to the Claims:**Listing of Claims:**

1. (Currently amended) A method for the production of acrylic acid which comprises the steps of:

(a) supplying one or more gas components selected from the group consisting of propylene, propane and acrolein to a reactor for catalytic gas phase oxidation,

(b) obtaining an acrylic acid-containing gas by catalytic gas phase oxidation,

(c) introducing said acrylic acid-containing gas and supplying an aqueous absorbing solvent into an acrylic acid absorbing column, whereby an aqueous acrylic acid-containing solution is absorbed onto said acrylic acid absorbing column

(d) obtaining said aqueous acrylic acid-containing solution absorbed onto said acrylic acid absorbing column,

(e) obtaining crude acrylic acid from said aqueous acrylic containing solution in an azeotropic dehydration column by dehydration;

(f) introducing a polymerization inhibitor to said azeotropic dehydration column at any point between a point for supplying said aqueous acrylic acid containing solution and a point for supplying a reflux and not including the point for supplying said aqueous acrylic acid containing solution material and the point for supplying the reflux;

(g) optionally removing a low boiling substance from said aqueous acrylic acid-containing solution by using an azeotropic distillation column,

(h) obtaining acrylic acid and a high boiling substance-containing solution by removing the high boiling substance from said crude acrylic acid, ~~and~~ subsequently

(i) recovering acrylic acid by thermally decomposing an acrylic acid oligomer contained in said high boiling substance-containing solution, and

(j) supplying the acrylic acid recovered by thermally decomposing said acrylic acid oligomer from step (i) to said azeotropic dehydration column.

2. (Currently amended) A method according to claim 1, which further comprises performing the step of;

thermally decomposing the oligomer contained in said high boiling substance-containing

solution thereby lowering the a concentration of maleic acid contained in the recovered acrylic acid solution to a level of not higher than 5 wt. %.

3. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 1, which further comprises the steps of;

(j) for esterfying the acrylic acid obtained in said step (i) thereby producing an acrylic ester, or

(k) for further purifying the acrylic acid obtained in said step (i) thereby obtaining acrylic acid of high purity.

4. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 3, further comprising the step of cooling the aqueous acrylic acid-containing solution in a tank and/or a cooler between said steps (b) - (k) and the subsequent step.

5. (Previously presented) A method for the production of a polyacrylic acid or salt thereof characterized by producing said polyacrylic acid or salt by using the acrylic acid of high purity obtained at the step (k) set forth in claim 3 in a polymerization process.

6. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 5, further comprising the step of cooling the aqueous acrylic acid-containing solution in a tank and/or a cooler between said step (k) and a step for producing the polyacrylic acid or salt.

7. (Previously presented) A method for the production of a polyacrylic acid or salt thereof, characterized by producing said polyacrylic acid or salt by using the acrylic acid of high purity obtained at the step (k) set forth in claim 4 in a polymerization process.

8. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 1, wherein said distillation column is at least one member selected from the group consisting of the azeotropic dehydration column, the heavy-ends cut column and the maleic acid separation column.

9. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 1, wherein said distillation column is at least one member selected from the group consisting of the azeotropic dehydration column and the heavy-ends cut column.

10. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 1, wherein said thermal decomposition of the acrylic acid oligomer to acrylic acid in the step (i) is carried out at a temperature of 120° - 220°C.

11. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 1, wherein said thermal decomposition of the acrylic acid oligomer is carried out in a thermal decomposition vessel.

12. (Canceled).

13. (Canceled).

14. (Canceled).

15. (Canceled).

16. (Canceled).

17. (Canceled).

18. (Canceled).

19. (Canceled).

20. (Canceled).

21. (Canceled).

22. (Canceled).

23. (Canceled).

24. (Canceled).

25. (Canceled).

26. (Canceled).